DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 224 571 PS 013 239

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TITLE Project LOVE (Let Older Volunteers Educate).
PUB DATE Nov 82
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America (35th, Boston, MA, November 19-23, 1982).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; *Older Adults; Questionnaires; *Student Attitudes; *Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS *Intergenerational Programs

ABSTRACT

The effect of contact with older adult volunteers on the attitudes of elementary school students was investigated by twice administering questionnaires to all first-, third-, and fourth-grade students at Chapin Elementary School, Chapin, South Carolina. Teachers first administered the questionnaire before the older adults began volunteer work in the first and fourth grades; the measure was administered a second time after the volunteers had worked in classrooms for 6 months. (Third-grade students acted as a control group.) Topics taught by the older adult volunteers included bowling, math, gardening, baking bread, crocheting, history telling, making Christmas wreaths, life perspectives (through viewing pictures of different age groups), the aging process and changes in vision, and kite making. During the 1981-1982 school year, 112 fourth-grade students had weekly contact with the volunteers. In addition, the volunteers gave four different presentations to 82 first-grade students during the year. Results are discussed, and questionnaires used are appended. (RH)

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Project LOVE

(Let Older Volunteers Educate)

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Presented at the 35th Annual Scientific Meeting of
The Gerontological Society of America
November 22, 1982

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Project LOVE (Let Older Volunteers Educate).
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The effects of older volunteers working in an elementary school on childrens' attitudes toward old people will be presented. The data was gathered from Project LOVE (Let Older Volunteers Educate) where "Grandpersons" volunteer their time and skills at an elementary school. Crafts, folklore, and living history are presented on a weekly basis as part of the experience of interacting with "Grandpersons."

Three hundred first, third, and fourth grade students were tested on two separate occasions; once, at the beginning of the school year; and again, at the conclusion of the school year. The control comparison group was the third grade students who did not have contact with "Grandpersons."

The data was analyzed using McNemar's chi-square. This research tests the hypothesis that childrens' attitudes are positively affected through exposure to "Grandpersons" and measures changes in the childrens' 1) responses on a 24 item attitude scale, 2) descriptions of old people, and 3) responses to the questions (a) "Do you want to get old?" and (b) "If I had a grandperson in my classroom, I would feel _____."

Project LOVE

(Let Older Volunteers Educate)

Introduction

This presentation reports on research that measured the effect that contact with older volunteers in an elementary school had on childrens' attitudes toward old people. This presentation will include a description of Project LOVE and the questionnaires utilizedto measure changes in the childrens' attitudes along with the results and implications of this study.

Description of Project LOVE (Let Older Volunteers Educate)

Project LOVE (Let Older Volunteers Educate) is an intergenerational learning experience in which "grandpersons" volunteer their time and talents at a local elementary school. Begun in November, 1981, Project LOVE is sponsored by the Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission Aging Program and Lexington County School District Five with funding from the Older Americans Act. It was started to provide a positive interactional experience between the young and the old. The "Grandpersons" involved in Project LOVE live in Chapin, South Carolina; a growing rural town adjacent to a lake. The "Grandpersons" volunteer their time and talents on a weekly basis to students at Chapin Elementary School.

Topics and areas taught by the "Grandpersons" during the school year 1981-1982 included: bowling and math, gardening, baking bread, crocheting, history telling, making Christmas wreaths, life perspectives (through viewing pictures of different age groups), the aging process and eye changes,

and kite making, One hundred and twelve fourth grade students had weekly contact with the "Grandpersons" during the year. In addition, the "Grandpersons" gave four different presentations to 82 first grade students during the year.

Review of Intergenerational Programs/Research

Programs like Project LOVE are important because children today frequently have little or no contact with older adults (Mead, 1976; Jantz, 1976). Many view the elederly in a negative, stereotyped way and fear the aging process (Snyder, 1981; Storey, 1977; Jantz, 1976). In addition, utlization of older workers in a meaningful school learning situation is a relative rare phenonemon in our society today. Both the aged and young suffer from this lack. Many countries are moving ahead of the United States in formulating policies that recognize the need for children and older adults to interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1980; Seefeldt, 1977).

Foster Grandparent Programs and intergenerational learning programs are one solution to the separation of old and young. Intergenerational programs that have been implemented have had good results (Tice, 1978; Serock, 1977; Seefeldt, 1977).

Benefits to children include: (1) increased motivation in learning academic skills, (2) enhanced meaning of history and cultural traditions, (3) imorovement of the child's self-concept and feelings of self-worth, and (4) an opportunity to gain a perception of aging as a natural part of the life process (Tice, 1978; Grambs, 1980; Brahce, 1980; Seefeldt, 1977).

Grambs (1980) writes:

> Although the times which lie ahead of our youth will be vastly different from those through which a person 60 or 70 years lived, there are many similar decision points. Just like their elders before them, youth must make critical educational and career choices, select a spouse, decide about when or if to have children, and face crises of illness, accident, death, separation, and economic uncertainty.

Benefits to the older person include: (1) an improved perception of health, (2) a feeling of being socially useful, (3) development of new interests, and (4) improved relationships to their neighborhoods (Kriegler, 1978; Seefeldt, 1977; Brahce, 1980). In addition, many people believe that formulation of policies related to the care and treatment of the elderly will be positively influenced because of policy makers' previous experiences as children with older people (Snyder, 1981; Jantz, 1976).

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT LOVE RESEARCH

Methods

All the first, third, and fourth grade students at Chapin Elementary School were administered a questionnaire in November, 1981 before the "Grandpersons" started volunteer work in the first and fourth grades. The third grade students acted as the control group. The same questionnaire was readministered in May, 1982, after the "Grandpersons" had worked with the first and fourth grade students for six months. Teachers administered these questionnaires during regular class time. Instructions on how to administer the questionnaire were given by the researcher to each teacher prior to the administration of the questionnaire.

Questionnaire

Two questionnaires were developed for measuring the effects of Project LOVE (see attached questionnaires, Appendix A). Because some first grade students cannot read and select standard Yes, No answers, a separate questionnaire was developed for first grade students in which responses were scored on answers of a smiling face or a frowning face. The questionnaire for third and fourth grade students included the following items: (1) the number of grandpersons a child has, and (2) the amount of contact (s)he has with them; (3) whether the child knows another older person, and (4) the frequence of contact; (5) a one-word description of old people; (6) whether the child would like to get old; and (7) how the child would feel if (s)he had a grandperson in class. Ir addition, the questionnaires included an attitude scale consisting of questions based on an attitude scale from Project TLC (Teaching Learning Communities) in Michigan.

Analyses

Analyses were performed on students who were present and answered the questionnaire both times. There remained 58 first grade students, 96 third grade students, and 112 fourth grade students. Changes in responses between November and May were analyzed using McNemar's chi square.

Results

The figures listed here are given in Appendix C. Interpretation of these results will be given during the slide presentation.

1. Fourth Grades: "Write a Word that Describes Old People."
2. Third & Fourth Grades: Percent Positive Responses to: "Write a Word That Describes Old People."

3. Third & Fourth Grades: Percent Positive Responses to: " If We Had a Grandperson in Our Class, I'd Feel. . ."

4. Third & Fourth Grades: Percent of "Always" answers to: "Old People Can Learn New Ways of Doing Things."

5. Third & Fourth Grades: Percent of "Always" answers to: "Old People are Nice to Children."

6. First Grade: Distribution of Answers to "When I am with Old People, I Feel. . ."

Students' Comments

At the conclusion of the school year the fourth graders were asked to write a description of what Project LOVE meant to them. The following are a few examples of the enthusiastic comments written about Project LOVE and the "Grandpersons."

Older People are Helpful

> Older people are helpful people. When you feel down and need someone to talk to, older persons are willing to talk with you. If you need any help with anything they'll help you. They know alot about everything. They are good teachers and never need to use books, they know so much. I think older people are great!

Grandpersons are Great Friends

> I look at the Grandpersons as my own grandparents. The Grandpersons understand about your feelings, especially Mrs. Juanita Metts. They are sweet and kind and they listen. Mrs. Metts is easy to talk to. Sometimes when I work with them they talk about their childhood. I think there is no other way to say it, but they really are like grandparents. I think anyone who works with them will take them as their grandparents too. Grandpersons really are great friends.

My Feelings about Project LOVE

> I think Project LOVE is a real great thing for kids to have. Its the greatest thing I ever had. I'm always looking forward to Friday, because Friday is when we get to be with Project LOVE. I think it's real fun. The

grandpersons have a way with kids. That way is very special. I do hope it never goes away because I like Project LOVE alot.

Project LOVE: A Great Way to Educate A Kid

What's it for . . . extra attention. LOVE stands for "Let Older Volunteers Educate", and it does just what it says! We like it because it teaches us things that school doesn't. It teaches how to be patient, enjoy work, and feel good about yourself.

Grandpersons are Fun

Grandpersons do a lot of fun things. They are nice and they they like children. The children like them too. They have a lot of experience and they teach you how to do a lot of fun things. They teach you how to bowl, how to grow things in a garden, and they even teach you how to cook too! They are so nice that everyone likes them in the whole fourth grade in all of the classes. They never scream or yell at you. All they do is tell you to be quiet. Project LOVE is a nice thing to do for every school.

My Feelings About the Grandpersons

Grandpersons can make you feel good. When you work with a grandperson you feel excited. They make me feel happy and glad. Sometimes you feel a little busy. They can make you happy when you're sad. Grandpersons do a lot of things for you. Grandpersons make you feel good when they tell you stories and do other things with you.

These examples demonstrate the benefit to the children along with their desires to have grandpersons in the classroom.

Conclusions and Implications

The significant increase in positive characteristics used by the children to describe old people shows positive changes over the school year in their description and concepts of old people. In addition, the students' responses in the category "(Very) Happy" to the question, "If we had a grandperson in my class, I would feel . . ." demonstrates a strong and increasing desire to have older people in the classrooms.

Finally, the students' written comments about Project LOVE clearly demonstrate their desire for and the benefits obtained from this intergenerational learning experience.

This study adds further evidence of the value of intergenerational programs and policies that encourage participation by old people--one of our country's most valuable resources. As Margaret Mead (1978) points out, the need for intergenerational learning programs is increasing; such programs have a good chance of success because both old people and young people need to relate to and learn from each other. The potential benefits from programs like Project LOVE are tremendous.

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SP:mnp
Fall, 1982

PROJECT LOVE
Fourth Graders

"Write a word that describes old people"

		Posttest			
		Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Pretest	Positive	71	1	0	72
	Neutral	17	9	0	26
	Negative	1	0	0	1
	Total	89	10	0	99

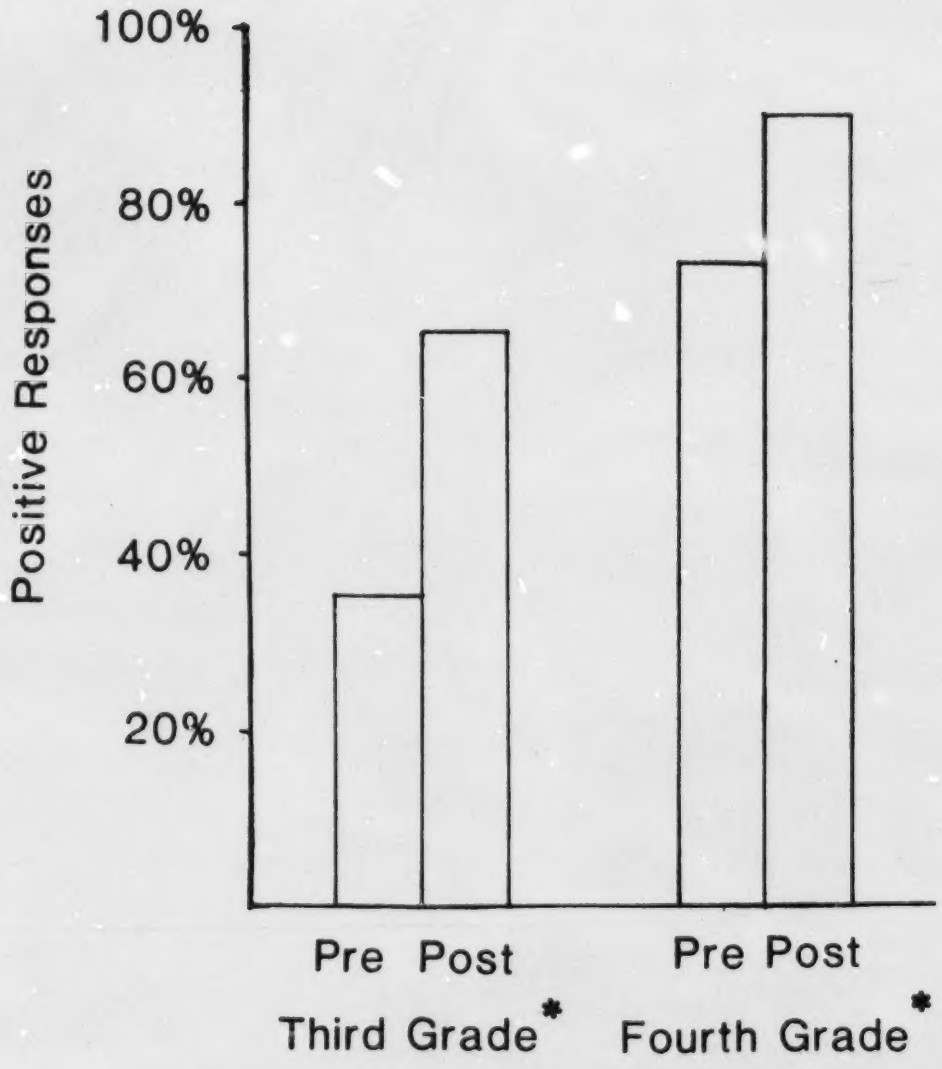
P <.0001

PROJECT LOVE

Third & Fourth Grades:

Percent Positive Responses to

"Write a word that describes old people"



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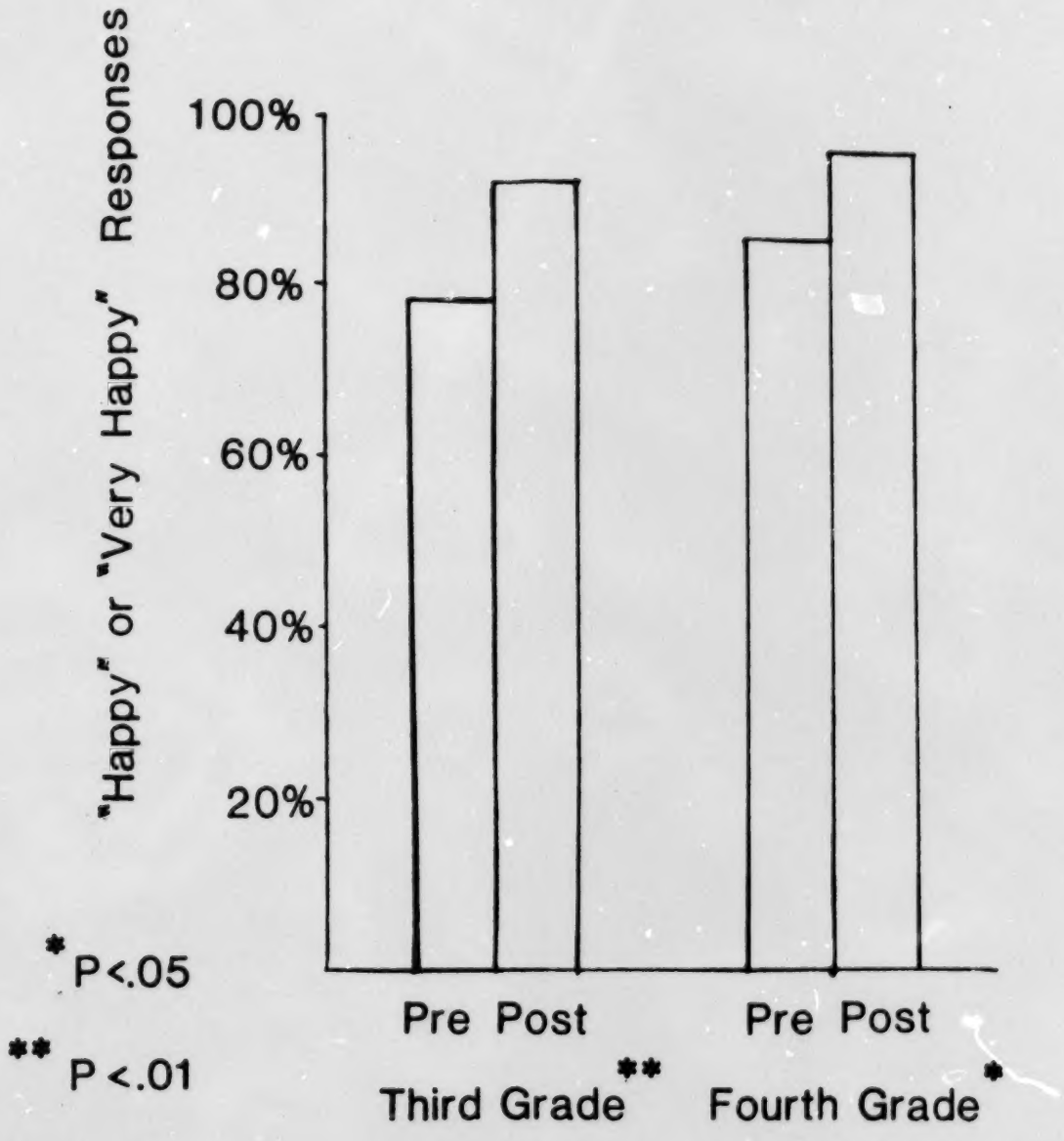
PROJECT LOVE
Third & Fourth Grades

Percent "Happy" or "Very Happy" Responses to:

"If we had a grandperson in our class, I'd feel..."



* P<.05

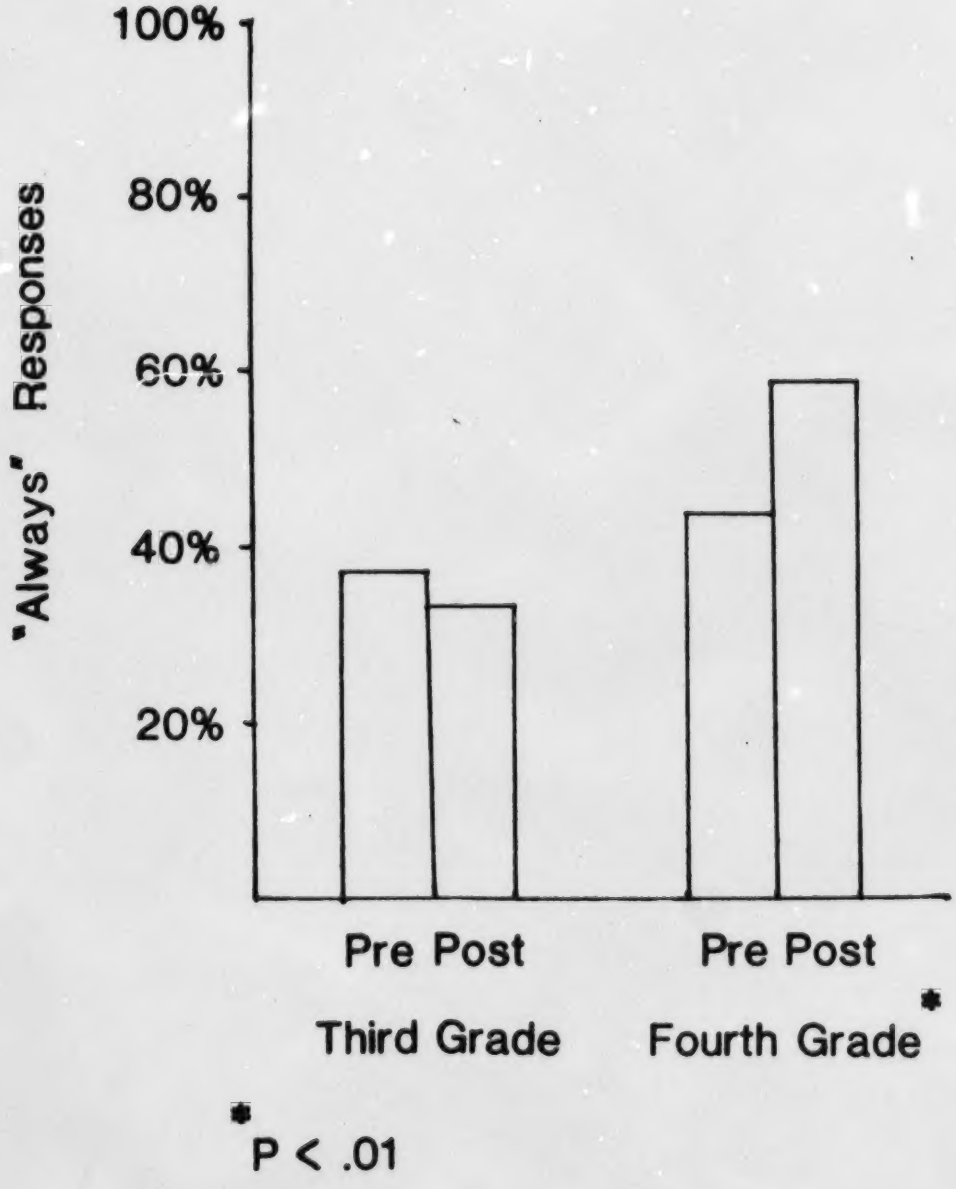
** P<.01

PROJECT LOVE

Third & Fourth Grades

Percent of "Always" Responses to:

"Old people can learn new ways of doing things"



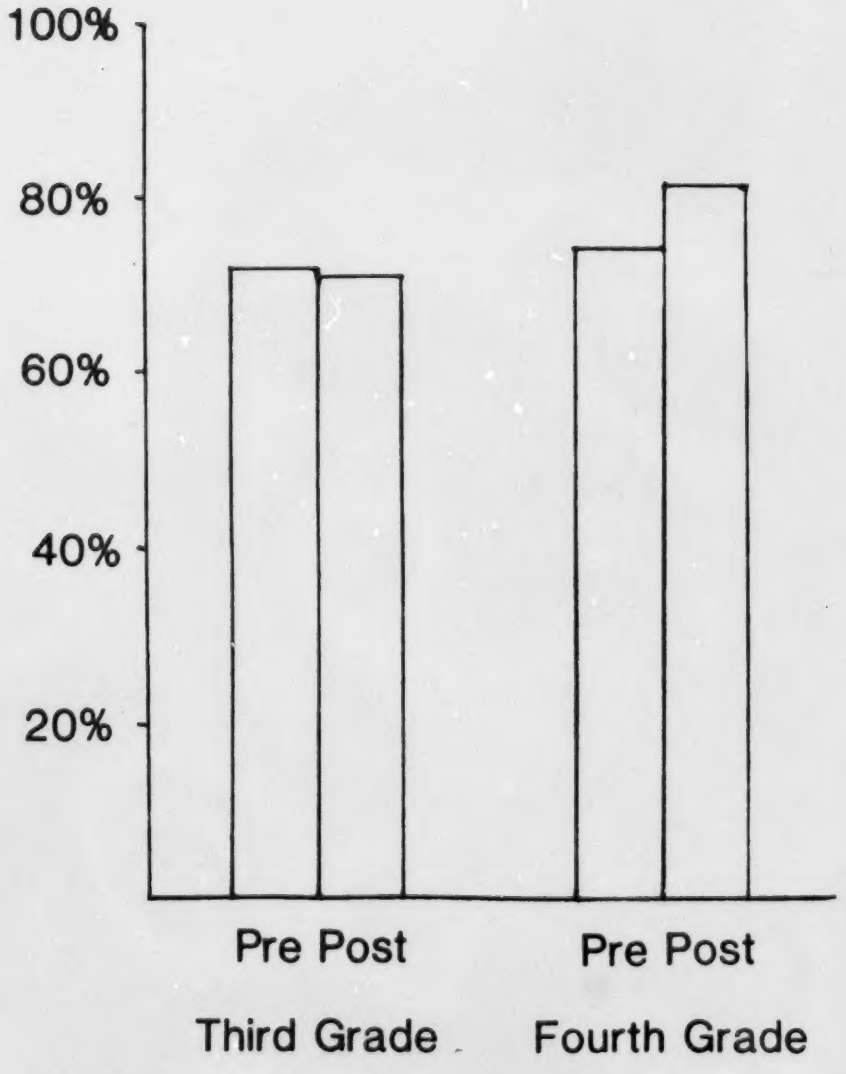
* P < .01

PROJECT LOVE

Third & Fourth Grades

Percent of "Always" Answers to:

"Old people are nice to children"



PROJECT LOVE

First Grade

Distribution of Answers to:

"When I am with old people, I feel..."

	Happy	Sad
Pretest		
	84%	16%
Posttest		
	91%	9%